



Coated Tongue and Discoloration

What can cause a tongue to change color?

What is Coated Tongue?

Coated Tongue, or White Tongue, is identified by an appearance of a white coating on the tongue. This can occur when the papillae on the tongue (the small structures on the surface of the tongue that give it its rough texture) become swollen or inflamed. Food debris, bacteria, and dead cells that become stuck between the swollen papillae can appear as a white coating.

What Causes Inflamed Papillae?

Papillae can become swollen or inflamed for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Poor oral hygiene
- Dry mouth (could be naturally occurring or caused by medication)
- Mouth breathing
- Tobacco usage
- Excessive alcohol usage
- Dehydration
- Fever
- A diet consisting of mostly soft foods
- Irritation

What Else Causes Tongue Discoloration?

There are several reasons that a tongue may become discolored and the discoloration can present in multiple ways:

White Patches

- Creamy white patches could be thrush (fungal infection)
- Lacy-looking white patches could be lichen planus (immune system attacks mouth tissues)
- Hard, flat, white areas that can't be scraped away could be leukoplakia (could be linked to cancer)

Yellow Patch

- A whitish-yellow patch appearing on your tongue near your throat could be caused from gastric reflux

Hairy Tongue

- Appearing as black, brown, or white fur on the tongue, the "hairs" are long strands of proteins that can be removed by brushing or scraping
- Hairy, white patches could be hairy leukoplakia and is more common for those infected with viruses



Should I See a Doctor?

Coated (White) Tongue is frequently harmless and can be treated by using a tongue scraper or gently brushing the tongue with a toothbrush.

Address tongue discoloration with your doctor or dentist if:

- Your Coated (White) Tongue lasts longer than a few weeks
- The widespread discoloration on your tongue is a color other than white
- The discoloration appears in patches on your tongue
- Your tongue is painful
- You are concerned about changes

Black Tongue

- Though Hairy Tongue may appear black, black discoloration can also occur after taking an antacid containing the ingredient of bismuth
 - This type of discoloration is temporary and should disappear once the medication is discontinued

Cherry Red Tongue

- Could be an early sign of Kawasaki disease (most prevalent in children)
- Is a symptom of scarlet fever
- If the tongue is both bright red and smooth, it could be assign of vitamin B3 deficiency



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